

HUMAN SERVICES PROGRAM QUALITY REVIEW

EDGEFIELD COUNTY DSS

SEPTEMBER 2001

The South Carolina Department of Social Services Human Services Division conducted a qualitative review of Edgefield County DSS in Fall 2001.

The review was conducted on site, and consisted of case record reviews, staff interviews, client contacts, and external stakeholder interviews. In this review, the external stakeholders interviewed were foster parents, the Foster Care Review Board, the Guardian ad litem, and the Administrative Family Court Judge.

DEMOGRAPHIC AND SAMPLE INFORMATION

Program under review	Referrals Not Accepted As CPS Reports	CPS Investigation	CPS Treat. - Active	CPS Treat. - Closed	Foster Care - Active	Foster Care - Closed	Foster Home Licensing
Period Under Review	5/01/01 - 7/31/01	3/01/01 - 5/30/01	7/31/01	5/01/01- 7/31/01	7/31/01	5/01/01 - 7/31/01	7/31/01
Case Population for Period Under Review	0	16	13	4	11	3	5
Cases Sampled	0	16	13	4	11	3	5
Cases Reviewed	0	16	13	4	10	3	4

This report is in 3 major sections: the Review Summary by Critical Decision Points, the General Findings section outlining strengths and issues which may require action, and the Measures and Outputs section which applies the review findings to the Agency's Child Welfare Outcomes.

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REVIEW SUMMARY BY CRITICAL DECISION POINTS

Intake:

For the sample period, Edgefield DSS had no referrals not accepted as CPS reports. The lack of referrals not accepted as CPS reports may indicate either the county is accepting the majority of referrals as CPS reports, the county may not be documenting all referrals received, or there were no referrals during the review period.

The intake documentation on the files available addressed probe interviewing by the intake worker and proper and consistent consideration by both the worker and supervisor of the allegations to determine whether or not to investigate.

Investigation:

Based on case review and staff interviews, the county usually responded with successful initial contacts quickly. However, we found in general that most investigative activity took place within the first 10 days to 2 weeks of the investigation. There were usually no followup contacts recorded to update the case circumstances when the case decision staffing was held. Documentation of investigative activities were usually brief and incomplete. Collateral contacts were generally not documented, although staff when interviewed stated that some collateral contacts were made.

We noted the county was effective in ensuring that Safety Plans were developed in instances where children were not removed. The safety and risk were assessed completely for all children in the home at the initial contact.

Case Decision:

In the majority of investigations reviewed, supervisory review and guidance in the decision making process was well documented in case records or reported in staff interviews. Despite the limited documentation, case decisions were usually supported by the evidence documented in the case files or systems. The county was effective in making efforts to notify the parties involved in the investigation of the case decision. The investigation was usually completed within 10 to 14 days and the case decision usually made after 40 days.

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Case Transfer/Transition to Treatment and Foster Care:

Due to the small number of staff, Edgefield DSS has an informal process of transferring cases from Investigations to the Treatment and Foster Care. Based on staff interviews and case record documentation, the initial contacts with the family and children by staff working with Foster Care cases usually occurred within 2 weeks of the case decision. In CPS Treatment cases, the initial contact with the family occurred about 1 month after the case decision.

Foster Care (Out-of-Home) :

Assessment and Treatment Planning:

Foster Care:

Based on the documents reviewed and interviews with staff, family assessment and case planning for Foster Care cases included input and involvement from the family and/or affected service providers. Placement Plans generally clearly described specific tasks, goals, or desired changes in behavior. For children in foster care with a permanent plan of Independent Living, the Placement Plan provided specific description of what skills were needed to prepare the child for transition from foster care, how those skills were to be acquired, and by when. Placement Plans for children in foster care specifically addressed the medical, educational, or social needs for the individual child.

Service Delivery:

Foster Care:

Based on case review, we found that while the county was effective in initiating services after placement. Regular contacts were documented for Foster Care cases with ongoing safety assessed for the child(ren) in care. The detail of what transpired in the various activities documented in the system was usually complete and descriptive. Children in care experienced between 0 and 5 placement changes on average. The reason for placement changes was generally documented, primarily working towards placing sibling groups together.

Interaction between the Agency and the Foster Care Review Board was documented on the computer system and in case files, and copies of the findings from those hearings were on file. Edgefield Foster Parents surveyed indicated they were notified of upcoming FCRB hearings and provided the Progress Report required if they could not attend FCRB.

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Closure:

Foster Care cases which were closed documented staffing or case evaluation activity which supported the decision to close. Foster Care cases generally were closed with the input of the child when appropriate, the family, and service providers in the decision to close or planning the closure of the case.

Court Activity Foster Care (Out-of-Home) :

Interviews with DSS staff, the Administrative Family Court Judge, Edgefield County Guardian ad Litem, and the Foster Care Review Board were completed. The stakeholders interviewed a positive, close working relationship with Edgefield DSS. In case review, court hearings were on schedule.

CPS (In-Home) Treatment

CPS Treatment:

In CPS Treatment cases, there was little input or involvement from the family or service providers. Treatment Plans generally clearly described specific tasks, goals, or desired changes in behavior.

CPS Treatment:

Based on case review, we found that while the county was effective in initiating services after the case decision. Regular contacts were documented for CPS Treatment cases with ongoing safety assessed for the child(ren) in the home. The detail of what transpired in the various activities documented in the system was usually complete and descriptive.

Evaluation:

Evaluation of ongoing cases tended to focus on progress toward goal achievement via changes in behavior and/or circumstances. Supervisory involvement and guidance was extensive in all cases.

Closure:

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CPS Treatment cases which were closed documented staffing or case evaluation activity which supported the decision to close. Treatment cases were closed with the input of the family and service providers in the decision to close or planning the closure of the case.

Foster Home Licensing:

Recruitment Plan:

Edgefield County has a Recruitment and Retention Plan dated 11-27-01 on file with the SCDSS.

Initial Licenses:

Assessment summaries were thorough and all inspections and background checks were properly completed.

License Renewal:

Renewal of Foster Home Licenses was completed prior to the expiration of the previous license. In our file review, we noted appropriate completion of records checks, with the exception of 1 Sexual Offender Registry check for a child in 1 home. (License #21002, Willie Campbell)

Ongoing Activities:

Based on documentation in the licensing files, staff interviews, and Foster Parent contacts, regular quarterly contacts are taking place, with a clear focus on issues of foster parenting and licensure.

GENERAL FINDINGS

The findings below affect the quality of the casework and service delivery either directly or indirectly. They are based on staff interviews, stakeholder interviews, client interviews, case records, and computer system review.

STRENGTHS OF EDGEFIELD COUNTY DSS.

1. Edgefield DSS management staff have developed an informal system to ensure regular opportunities for discussion of case situations, supervisory input and guidance, and mutual decision making. They made appropriate safety plans and ensured ongoing safety of the children in their care.

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2. External stakeholders view Edgefield DSS as a positive force in improving service delivery in the community. Edgefield DSS has a close and cooperative working relationship with other service agencies in the community
3. Edgefield DSS is responsive in initiating investigations quickly.
4. For children in foster care with a permanent plan of Independent Living, the Placement Plan provided specific description of what skills were needed to prepare the child for transition from foster care, how those skills were to be acquired, and by when.
5. Children in care in the cases we reviewed experienced from 1 to 5 changes in placements. We found no correlation of number of placements with either time in care or the age of the child in care. The reasons for changes in placement were clearly explained.
6. The focus of supervisory review tended toward evaluating the progress of the client and/or family in changing behaviors or circumstances.

ISSUES REQUIRING POSSIBLE ACTION IN EDGEFIELD COUNTY DSS:

1. In CPS Treatment, parents were not directly involved in the development of their case plan.
2. The initiation of CPS Treatment services after case decision generally took several weeks and increased the time of agency involvement. With the limited client involvement in case planning cited above, the quality of the plan does not support the delay in developing and initiating services in CPS Treatment cases.
3. When caseworkers were interviewed and asked about specific cases, they were generally able to describe ongoing activities and contacts which were not documented. Lack of time was the

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common reason given for delays in documenting or not documenting activities fully. Several staff work after hours to complete documentation.

4. We noted delays in making investigative case decisions after all information had been gathered to make the decision. This delay resulted in several case decisions made after the 45 day deadline for case decisions with no formal approval of extending the deadline.

While faced with some issues of follow through and direction in the CPS Treatment program, the Edgefield DSS human services programs are generally stable and meeting the needs of their clients. The Agency has an effective communication system which provides opportunities to resolve those issues mentioned above.

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MEASURES AND OUTPUTS

Outcome 1: Increase permanency for children in Foster Care (Safe and Stable Home for Every Child)

Measure	Source	County		State	
		#	%	#	%
Total Children in Care	SACWIS	14	100%	4862	100%
Children in care more than 12 months	SACWIS	9	64.29%	3052	62.77%
In care more than 12 months where permanency hearing has not been held	SACWIS	1	11.11%	1044	34.21%
Children in care for whom permanency plan has not been achieved within 3/6 months after permanency planning hearing	SACWIS	Report under development			

Summary: Edgefield DSS has the structure in place to enable achievement of this outcome.

Outcome 2: Reduce Time in Foster Care to Adoption

Measure	County		State	
	#	Months	#	Months
Average number of months in foster care until adoption is final	0	N/A	469	46.40
Average number of days/months in foster care after permanency planning hearing approves a plan of TPR or adoption for the child	Report under development			
Average number of days/months in foster care after TPR is granted	Report under development			

Summary: Not applicable to this county.

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Outcome 3: Improve Child Well-Being

Measure	County		State	
	#	%	#	%
Number and percentage of children and adolescents attending school and performing: passing grades, maintaining grade level, school readiness (1 st), truancy, suspensions/expulsions, literacy, diploma/GED, secondary education	In the 7 cases reviewed where Foster Children were in school, we found that 4 were on grade level, and not exhibiting attendance or behavior problems. 2 cases were receiving support services.			
Number and percentage of children and adolescents who show physical and mental health is stable or improving (therapy, screenings)	In the 10 cases reviewed, we found that the 3 children identified with mental health or adjustment issues were actively receiving therapy or counseling.			
Number and percentage of children with substance abuse are stable or improving	In the 10 cases reviewed, we found that no children were identified with substance abuse issues.			
Number and percentage of runaways	1	7.14%	95	1.95%
Number and percentage who age out of foster care and failed to meet goals	Report under development			
Number and percentage who become pregnant	From case file review and caseworker interviews, we noted no cases of pregnancy or fatherhood.			
Number and percentage who are adjudicated for delinquency: once, more than once.	In the 10 cases reviewed, we found no children currently involved with delinquency issues.			

Summary: Based on case reviews, children in foster care in Edgefield are generally not experiencing problems with school, behavior, or substance abuse. The Independent Living cases reviewed documented realistic case plans to prepare the child for leaving foster care.

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Outcome 4: Reduce Time in Foster Care to Reunification Without Increasing Re-entry

Measure	County		State	
	#	%	#	%
Number and percentage of children who show physical and mental health stability and/or improvement	Based on our review of 10 Foster Care cases and caseworker interviews, all children were either receiving counseling or in a supportive placement which stabilized any physical or mental health conditions.			
Number and percentage of parents with substance abuse who are stable and/or improving	Report under development			
Average number of family/relative visits per child per month (parents, other relatives)	In the Foster Care cases where visitation was a part of the case plan, we noted an average of 2 visits per child per month from family or relatives.			
Number of children who return to foster care after reunification within 12 months	0	0.00%	201	8.72%

Summary: Our case review indicated that visitation occurred on a regular and planned basis. In those instances where visitation did not occur as planned, there was documented followup with the parent or relative to address the need for visitation or reasons for not attending.

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Outcome 5: Reduce Placements of Young Children in Group Homes or Institutions (Federal Requirements)

Measure	County		State	
	#	%	#	%
Percentage of children age 12 years and below placed in group homes or institutions	9	3.31%	272	100%

Summary: Edgefield DSS is taking the age of the child into consideration when arranging placements, by considering the availability of individual foster homes first. The small number of individual foster homes in Edgefield County precludes placement of siblings together unless in a group home or institution.

Outcome 6: Reduce/Prevent Abuse of Children in Foster Care

Measure	County		State	
	#	%	#	%
Number of children in foster care with substantiated or indicated maltreatment by a foster parent or facility staff person	0	0.00%	98	100%

Summary: Edgefield DSS has regular telephone and face-to-face contacts with foster parents by staff. The topics discussed are clearly documented. Visits with foster children are also clearly documenting an ongoing assessment of the child's safety.

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Outcome 7: Increase Stability of Placements and Other Aspects of Foster Children's Lives

Measure	County		State	
	#	%	#	%
Percentage of children in foster care with more than two placements	7	5.00%	2690	55.53%

Summary: The majority of cases we reviewed had between 0 and 5 placements. The reasons for changing placements were documented clearly in the record, primarily moving siblings to joint placements.

Outcome 8: Increase Stability of Children's Lives

Measure	County		State	
	#	%	#	%
Percentage of children who change schools/schools systems:	Of the 3 children in Foster Care who are attending school:			
Once	None (0.00%) had changed school once as the result of placement			
More than once	3 (100.00%) had changed school more than once as the result of placements.			
Percentage of cases with more than one change in foster care case workers	Of the 10 cases reviewed, 2 (20.00%) had more than one change in foster care caseworkers.			

Summary: The documentation in the files reviewed did not directly address changes in schools or school districts, but review staff were able to determine from dictation those changes in schools that were recorded.

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Outcome 9: Reduce/Prevent Abuse and Neglect of Children

Measure	County		State	
	#	%	#	%
Number and percentage of indicated cases of child abuse and/or neglect:	0	0.00%	538	36.00%
Total				
Among high-risk populations	Report under development			
Number of fatalities among children known to the agency	Reported Elsewhere			

Summary: Edgefield DSS has regular staffing procedures in place to address effective case decision-making. In actual practice, case decisions are based on extensive contact with the family. As stated before, an ongoing assessment of child safety in active CPS Treatment and Foster Care cases is not clearly documented.

Outcome 10: Reduce/Prevent Recurrence of Child Abuse and Neglect

Measure	County		State	
	#	%	#	%
Number and percentage of cases of children with 2 nd indicated report within 12 months of the 1 st indicated report	Report under development			
Number and percentage of cases of children with 2 nd indicated report within 12 months of reunification	Report under development			

Summary: We noted that most cases reviewed did not have prior CPS history, either of unfounded reports, active agency involvement, or not accepted at referral.

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Outcome 11: Limit the Number of Abused and/or Neglected Children Entering Foster Care to Those Who are Truly Endangered in Their Home

Measure	County		State	
	#	%	#	%
Number and percentage of children court ordered into placement	5	35.71%	1131	23.26%
Number and percentage of children placed informally (with relatives)	0	0.00%	269	5.53%
Number and percentage of treatment cases closed with risk reduced and treatment goals achieved (i.e. parents' and children's physical/mental health and safety improved)	4	17.39%	360	7.24%

Summary: The limited involvement of service providers in the closure decision, especially with CPS Treatment, calls into question the validity of the number above.

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Outcome 12: Minimize Intrusion upon the Lives of Families and Children

Measure	County		State	
	#	%	#	%
Number and percentage of children and families, when asked, indicate/feel that the agency intruded in their lives:	In the client interviews conducted, all interviewees felt the involvement of the agency was an intrusion into their lives.			
Where services are provided (community based)	Interviews and case record reviews indicated the provision of services was often not available in the community, but as near to the client as available.			
How we deliver services (mutual planning)	In client interviews and in case record reviews, mutual planning was not occurring in CPS Treatment cases.			
When services are provided (convenient hours)	Most interviews reported that it was possible to arrange convenient times for service to be provided.			
How clients were treated (respect and dignity)	Foster Care clients interviewed reported that they were involved in planning, and treated with respect.			
Number of days/weeks from achievement of treatment goals to case closure in treatment cases	Report under development			

Summary: There are regular staffings with other agencies, with extensive progress reports provided. The lack of client involvement in CPS Treatment case planning can be a barrier to the achievement of this outcome.

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Outcome 13: Increase Supply of Foster Home Placement Slots

Measure	County		State	
	#	%	#	%
Number of licensed foster home placement slots	4	100%	1695	100%
Kinship care	Report under development			
Placements that fit	Report under development			
Close to home	Report under development			

Summary: Edgefield DSS has procedures in place to improve support to foster parents and to determine appropriate placements for children. However, there is not a plan for recruitment of new foster homes.

Outcome 14: Increase Number of Adoptions

Measure	County		State	
	#	%	#	%
Number of adoptions finalized	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Summary: Not Reviewed (Separate Organization)

Outcome 15: Reduce Number of Disrupted Adoptions

Measure	County		State	
	#	%	#	%
Number of adoptions disrupted within 12 months of finalization	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Summary: Not Reviewed (Separate Organization)